



Contact

For questions about the program or application process, please contact Sonja E. Kelly at skelly@accion.org

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The Center for Financial Inclusion at Accion announces the launch of a Research Fellows Program to support research and thought leadership in financial inclusion. The purpose of this program is to encourage independent researchers and analysts to examine systematically some of the most important challenges in the financial inclusion arena. Fellows will enter the program as either CFI Research Fellows or Accion Research Fellows or, depending on their focus. Each Fellow will conduct research, analysis, or writing on a topic of high importance to financial inclusion and will produce a paper to be published by CFI or Accion.

- CFI Fellows will conduct forward-looking analysis of major factors that will enable or hamper achievement of full financial inclusion.
- Accion Research Fellows will conduct research on work of Accion and its partners to examine its effectiveness and extract lessons for the financial inclusion sector.

CFI and Accion are seeking responses to a set of priority topics (see below). These topics are broad enough to leave a great deal of room for researchers to propose specific sub-topics and research approaches, but all submissions must respond to one of the four proposed areas. We anticipate selecting one Fellow in each topic, for a total of four Fellows in this round.

One Fellow will be selected as receiving the *Credit Suisse Fellowship*. The Credit Suisse Fellow will receive additional opportunities for dissemination of results through Credit Suisse networks.

All Fellows will receive:

- Listing on Accion or CFI websites, respectively, with photo and bio throughout the duration of their tenure as Fellows, generally between 4 and 12 months; (designated as junior fellow, fellow or senior fellow, depending on seniority)
- Access to CFI or Accion staff, as agreed, for consultation, research and interviews
- Access to Accion data (for Accion Fellows) as agreed in advance for use in their research
- Use of CFI office space on an occasional basis as needed to support the work
- CFI and Accion will prepare finished papers for publication and disseminate the final products through their existing channels of promotion and marketing, including blog- or video-based interviews and blogging opportunities.
- Support to help researchers move their findings toward action by relevant stakeholders.
- Compensation appropriate for scope of assignment and fellows' level of seniority.
- Reimbursement for limited travel expenses to conduct and/or present research.

Obligations of Fellows:

- Complete high-quality research and paper in an agreed time frame
- Respect confidentiality of internal information acquired during the fellowship
- Use own computer and communications
- Check in regularly with CFI staff regarding progress and content of work
- Submit near-final version of paper for review by CFI and selected external reviewers
- Present findings in at least two events organized by CFI or Accion

Fellows will be selected by an inter-departmental review committee on the basis of three equally weighted criteria as expressed in their proposals. Both junior and senior-level applicants will be considered. Criteria for selection include:

- Approach to the topic and framing of research questions
- Quality and feasibility of research plan
- Prior related experience and record of producing influential analytic work

The program will be administered by CFI. CFI will manage the selection and contracting process and oversee the research. For Accion Fellows, Accion staff will also be involved in oversight of research. Publication and dissemination will be handled by the respective Accion or CFI communications units.

Researchers wishing to apply for both CFI and Accion research projects are invited to submit a proposal in PDF form by 11:59 pm August 11, 2015 EST. Proposals may be directed to Sonja Kelly at skelly@accion.org.

Proposals should include:

- A cover letter (1 page)
 - A brief overview of the proposed research
 - A statement of the applicant's qualifications and previous experience
 - Research proposal (4-5 pages)
 - A discussion of the specific topic selected and its relevance to financial inclusion (particularly if it is not one of CFI and Accion's pre-selected topics)
 - The applicant's hypotheses and methodological approach
 - A detailed plan for the research including timeline (research and writing is expected to require between 3 and 9 months)
 - A description of the proposed output(s)
 - Description and justification of any special needs and requests
 - Budget
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Research Areas:

We have put forward relatively broad topics for research, and welcome proposals that focus on specific aspects of the following, as well as broader thought-piece treatment of the topics.

CFI Research Fellows

- **What are the conditions for “on-ramps” to lead to deeper inclusion?** With the World Bank’s commitment to Universal Financial Access and the Better than Cash Alliance’s pursuit of G2P payments, both of which focus on connecting people to transaction accounts, the next question is how (and whether) such connections lead to greater inclusion, through either active account usage or access to additional products. What cases demonstrate successful on-ramps and what factors or strategies enabled deeper inclusion to take place? Research could examine one or several examples.

- **Impact of ubiquitous Internet access on the business models for financial inclusion.** By 2020, the vast majority of the world’s people will have access to Internet through smart phones and tablets. Internet access could transform the way financial service providers and customers interact. For example, SMS could be displaced as the main mobile money channel by apps that connect directly to customers, altering the respective roles of mobile network operators and financial institutions. App-based services could also facilitate a richer interface with customers, involving local languages, scripts and pictures, among other features. What scenarios are possible or likely? What can be learned from offerings to date?

Accion Research Fellows:

- **Clients that grow from microenterprise to small business.** An increasing number of longer term clients in the portfolios of Accion partner microfinance institutions (MFIs) began working with their MFIs as microenterprises and have since grown into small businesses with higher turnover and more employees. This phenomenon merits closer examination in order to identify the factors that have supported such growth and the financial service needs of these enterprises when they reach larger scale. Research questions might include: prevalence of such clients; their characteristics; growth path and history as clients; and/or current sources and uses of financial services. Fellows pursuing this question may be able to gather data from an Accion institution. Research could draw from administrative data provided by the MFI, surveys or interviews with clients, or a combination.

- **Cost savings from technology in microfinance delivery.** Accion partner MFIs have taken various initiatives to incorporate technology into their operations with a view to reducing costs. These steps include use of data analytics to streamline the credit underwriting process, digital field applications to boost the productivity of front line staff or agents, and transaction automation such as mobile payments to reduce the cost of handling transactions. Research on this question could either focus on one type of technology use and assess its results across several institutions or, if a suitable methodology were available, it could look at results across technology types.